

Philosophical Production in Algeria: A reading from

Abdullah Sheriate's Thought

الإنتاج الفلسفي في الجزائر: قراءة في

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Abstract:

While the developed world consistently recognizes philosophy as a cornerstone of civilizational progress, many third-world nations—Algeria serving as a representative case—continue to marginalize philosophical inquiry. Algeria faces a profound civilizational deficit rooted in complex historical and sociopolitical factors. In response, Dr. Abdullah Sheriat has undertaken a systematic investigation to diagnose the underlying causes of this deficit and to propose viable solutions. This study looks at the knowledge and organizational challenges that lead to the neglect of philosophy in developing countries, and shows how bringing philosophical ideas back into discussions can help improve civilization.

Keywords: Civilization; Philosophy; Abdullah Sheriat; Obstacles; Solutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Western philosophy has successfully transcended the metaphysical propositions that shaped its historical development across various civilizations and has become increasingly adept at addressing contemporary challenges. This achievement may be attributed to its realistic and rational nature, its emphasis on intellectual and humanistic pursuits, and its broader focus on humanity. In contrast, many underdeveloped regions, including Algeria, have not yet achieved this level of rationality and continue to struggle with addressing contemporary challenges effectively.

To better understand this disparity, this study undertakes a detailed analytical examination of Dr. Abdallah Sheriat's book *The Ideological Problem and Development Issues*. The book addresses the principal challenges facing Algerian society, offering a realistic, rational, and critical analysis. The study seeks to propose educational and reform-oriented solutions aimed at overcoming the stagnation and underdevelopment prevalent in Algerian society. At the heart of this inquiry lie several critical questions: Can philosophy guide us toward a brighter future? Can intellectual thought reclaim its value over mechanization? Can we cultivate a productive citizenry? And, most importantly, can we rejuvenate the spirit of a society in decline?

Why Philosophy?

Philosophy represents the spirit of the Renaissance and serves as a powerful tool for intellectual liberation. It raises questions before providing answers and opens minds before filling them with certainties.

In developing countries, where societies continue to suffer from underdevelopment, authoritarianism, and dependency, philosophy offers a way out of stagnation by teaching individuals how to think rather than what to think.

Without philosophy, societies risk repeating the mistakes of the past and following paths drawn by others. Therefore, philosophy is not merely a choice—it is an existential necessity for those who aspire to shape the future rather than follow it passively.

Building on this conviction, the Algerian thinker Abdullah Sheriat sought to address the core issues facing Algeria. He argued that the root cause of the country's challenges lies in the absence of philosophy and rational thought. To support this conclusion, this study will explore Sheriat's perspectives on the key obstacles that have hindered Algeria's progress.

2. Obstacles to philosophical production in Algeria:

Through his book "The Ideological Problem and Development Issues," Abdullah Sheriat aimed to establish a project that underscores the importance of philosophy as the sole solution to overcoming the developmental challenges we face. He subsequently presented an array of obstacles that have impeded the progress towards civilization.

2.1 Absence of reason:

"No production without intellect." (Sheriat A. , The Ideological Problem and Development Issues, 1981)

One of the most significant issues facing Algeria is the absence of rationality and, consequently, rational thinking. This is encapsulated in the saying, "What makes philosophy difficult in our societies is the absence of reason, and the history of philosophy shows us what changes the human mind has brought about. Thus, the mark of 'civilization' is reason" (Sheriat, 1981, p. 05). The history of philosophical thought supports Sheriat's assertion: wherever rational thinking prevails, civilization thrives; when it is absent, civilization dissipates.

Rational thinking enabled Greece to transcend mythical thought, allowed the Abbasid civilization to establish one of the most advanced Islamic civilizations, and helped Europe

usher in the Renaissance and modernity. Therefore, the current backwardness can be attributed to the lack of rational thinking. Philosophy is not a barrier to progress; rather, it is a fundamental component of civilizational awareness. Neglecting it results in stagnation, and those who view philosophy as an obstacle to progress exemplify backwardness.

While philosophy has historically guided thought and played a crucial role in the development of humanity, society, and civilization, in Arab societies, it is often perceived as an impractical commodity that does not provide tangible benefits such as food, businesses, housing, or automobiles. Abdullah Shariati remarked: "All countries that consider philosophy an obstacle to progress are the same ones that stumble more than others because they do not recognize the true value of philosophy" (Sheriat, 1981, p. 09).

In his book, Sheriat draws a comparison between those who value philosophy and those who do not, ultimately concluding that "what makes philosophy difficult to practice today in developing societies is the absence of reason in all fields, which makes philosophy easier to practice in advanced societies" (Sheriat, 1981, p. 09). Thus, it can be inferred that the primary reason for the decline of philosophy in Algerian society is the pervasive lack of rationality. Sheriat's objective is to encourage the Algerian populace to embrace rational thinking across all domains.

2.2 Escaping reality :

"Philosophy is not a description of reality, but its treatment." (Sheriat, 1981, p. 05).

The concept of escaping reality has been a recognized theme in philosophy since the era of Greek civilization. Philosophers have often refrained from engaging directly with contemporary realities, thereby distancing themselves from practical applications. This reluctance to apply theoretical concepts to real-world contexts has hindered their understanding of tangible problems and viable solutions.

Aristotelian realism is mirrored in Abdullah Sheriat's assertion: "Man is by nature a social

animal," indicating that individuals must adapt to their external environment and acknowledge the necessity of social interaction, thus treating reality as it is. Sheriat emphasizes the importance of a scientific and realistic understanding of society (Sheriat, 1981, p. 05).

Similarly, Malik Bennabi addressed the issue of escaping reality in his book "Conditions of Renaissance." He compared those who evade reality to doctors who focus on symptom management while neglecting the underlying disease, likening them to "the doctor who faces a case of a patient with bacterial tuberculosis, not caring about combating the bacteria but rather focusing on the feverish agitation of the patient" (Bennabi, 2018, p. 45).

To be effectively integrated into society, philosophy must be grounded in reality and consider the needs and desires of the populace.

2.3 Following and relying on others:

"Everything we see as our future is the present of others."

"Buying civilization from abroad is easy, but it is also easy to vanish. The development that takes root in society, becomes entrenched, and grows is the one that humans cultivate with their own hands. True development is the transfer of knowledge, not the transfer of factories." (Sheriat, 1981, p. 102).

Developed countries did not import these values; rather, they cultivated intellectual and practical capabilities within their own populations, leading to the admiration of their achievements today. This perspective offers a powerful critique of passive modernization and underscores the importance of intellectual and scientific self-reliance. While external assistance may lay a foundation, it is imperative for a nation to invest in education, research, and human development to ensure sustainable and resilient progress.

The concept of escaping reality has been recognized in philosophy since the era of Greek

civilization. Philosophers have often avoided engaging with contemporary realities, distancing themselves from practical applications. This detachment from real-world issues and their feasible solutions results in a limited understanding of practical challenges.

Abdullah Sharit embodies Aristotelian realism with his assertion: "Man is by nature a social animal," which implies not only adaptation to one's external environment but also the necessity of social interaction. Reality must be approached as it is. Sharit advocates for a scientific and realistic comprehension of society, emphasizing the importance of aligning philosophical thought with the practical needs and desires of the populace.

2.4 Human development :

The issue of cultivating the Algerian individual has been a topic of discussion since the pre-liberation war era, particularly by Malek Bennabi, who posited that achieving civilization is intrinsically linked to transforming the individual first and subsequently guiding them towards civilization. The primary prerequisite for civilization is the state's ability to produce its own goods. But who is responsible for production and instigating change? Therefore, it is imperative that we become individuals capable of effecting change, producing, influencing, interacting, and fostering civilization.

The current situation in Algeria is characterized by mutual disdain among citizens, with individuals disparaging one another. Who are these people? Are we not all citizens? And if change does not begin with us, are we merely waiting for others to change before we do? Is everyone at least content with themselves? (Sheriat, p. 35). The most significant issue in Algeria is the tendency to seek reform in others without initiating change within ourselves.

We must critically examine the type of human model we aim to create and the quality of education we provide to support it. No Arab country in the Third World has adopted the approach of developing the individual first and empowering them to improve their surroundings independently.

We are operating contrary to the Chinese proverb, "If you give a fish to a poor man, you feed him for a day; if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime" (Sheriat, 1981, p. 99).

This underscores the necessity of establishing an applied philosophy focused on individual development, preparation, empowerment for production and work, and community advancement. During the liberation war, we adhered to a principle without excessive theorization: we recruited men or accepted volunteers into the liberation army on the condition that they armed themselves with enemy spoils. The underlying philosophy of this principle emphasized reliance on human capability over weaponry, positing that it is the soldier who creates the weapon, rather than the weapon creating the soldier.

However, post-liberation, we have deviated from this principle, placing reliance on pre-manufactured machinery and factories, thereby neglecting the human element. This shift has resulted in prioritizing weaponry over the soldier.

(Sheriat A., Theory on Education Policy and Arabization Complete Works - Part One, 2009, p. 89).

Subsequently, the operator of the machine became more important than the human being, leading to the sacrifice of human value for the machine that we manufacture or purchase (Sheriat, A., Theory on Education Policy and Arabization: Complete Works - Part One, 2009, p. 90). Consequently, Abdullah Sheriat emphatically advocated for restoring the importance and value that humans held during the war. This restoration is crucial for individuals to regain self-confidence and to feel that society requires their creativity and productivity.

Prioritizing machines over humans distances us from civilization, as it is humans who create civilization, not machines. This underscores the importance of valuing the producer rather than the products. Once human value is reinstated, individuals should be adequately

prepared, equipped, and introduced into the practical field.

3. Healing through philosophy:

"Change yourself,you change history." (Bennabi, 2018,p35)

Human beings have consistently navigated the trajectory of civilization, often finding themselves partially immersed in ideas and development, yet uncertain of how to achieve their ultimate goals. The contemporary role of philosophy is to delineate the process of shaping individuals who can theoretically influence the course of history with their intellectual contributions and practically through their actions and resources.

Consequently, it is imperative to establish a practical philosophy that can effectively influence both present and future societies, one that can be pragmatically applied across all its principles. This philosophy should be oriented towards the attainable rather than the idealized.

Reviving the passive Algerian populace is not an insurmountable task; historical figures such as Ibn Badis and Emir Abdelkader successfully mobilized the people in the past. Thus, individuals in positions of responsibility must demonstrate genuine and practical commitment to the ideas they endorse.

4. CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing analysis, the pivotal role of philosophy in addressing the civilizational deficit in developing countries—Algeria serving as a paradigmatic example—becomes increasingly evident. The continued marginalization of philosophy in such contexts reflects not merely a disciplinary neglect, but a profound epistemological and institutional failure.

This study has demonstrated that philosophy possesses a unique capacity to catalyze transformative change in societies plagued by stagnation, dependency, and the inertia of authoritarian structures. As a discipline grounded in rational reflection and critical inquiry, philosophy reorients individuals and communities toward autonomy, responsibility, and

meaningful engagement with reality. By humanizing development through ethical and intellectual foundations, it empowers societies to reclaim agency over their historical trajectories.

In response to the central research question—Can philosophy guide us toward a brighter future?—this study affirms that philosophy is not only capable of offering such guidance but is, in fact, indispensable to it. By fostering critical consciousness, prioritizing reflective thought over mechanical production, and cultivating an autonomous and responsible citizenry, philosophy emerges as a necessary condition for sustainable and authentic development.

To translate these insights into practice, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Reintegrate philosophy into educational curricula at all levels, with an emphasis on critical thinking and cultural relevance.
- Establish institutional platforms for philosophical dialogue that directly engage national development challenges.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between philosophy and other fields to inform human-centered public policies.
- Promote a cultural shift that recognizes intellectual labor as fundamental to progress, rather than a secondary concern or luxury.

Ultimately, if Algeria—and other similarly situated nations—aspire to transcend their current impasses and build futures grounded in autonomy, creativity, and reason, philosophy must be restored to its rightful place at the core of civilizational discourse.

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